

Testimony in Support of S.B. 284: An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status

March 9, 2022

Dear Sen. Moore, Rep. Abercrombie, and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Benjamin Oldfield. I am a pediatrician and the VP of Clinical Affairs at Fair Haven Community Health Care, a federally qualified health center in New Haven.

I write in support of S.B. 284, An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status.

As a community pediatrician, I work with families who have recently immigrated. Many are undocumented and some are with mixed documentation status. The goal of my medical practice is simple: to provide high-quality, equitable care to all families in a manner that honors their dignity. Unfortunately, I am unable to do this when families or family members are unable to receive health insurance due to their immigration status.

The pandemic added new distance to this disparity in care based on documentation status. Often, families with mixed status or fully undocumented families were also those whose members held “essential” jobs. They have been on the frontline of the food or service industry, and were therefore at greatest risk for COVID infection, disease, and death. They deserved a preferential option—a hero’s healthcare package!—and yet were unable to readily access the services that Husky enrollees so depend on. Current concerning trends in mental health disorders and substance use among youth, worsened by the pandemic, make access to primary and behavioral health care all the more important.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the Committee to support and pass this legislation, and to join other states (including Vermont, Maine, and New Jersey, who passed similar legislation in 2021) in offering Husky to eligible children regardless of immigration status. Additionally, I ask the Committee to remember that healthy children need healthy families. Looking forward, I also ask the Committee to open access to all eligible individuals regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,

Benjamin Oldfield, MD MHS

Fair Haven Community Health Care